

Exodus 1:8-2:10

Disobedient

I would like to take some time this morning to talk about a couple of upcoming events in the life of our church. We are calling October 8th, "Missions Sunday." Along with the Central Community Baptist Church in Waldo, we will be hosting two ABC missionaries, who will be sharing with us about their ministries: Emerson and Ivy Wu, from Hong Kong, and Sarah McCurdy from Costa Rica. Their visit with us works very well with the World Missions Offering emphasis in the month of October.

One of the reasons for mentioning this so much in advance is because we will not be having Sunday School on October 8th, but we will meet during the Sunday School hour. It is not beyond notice that some of you are not in the habit of coming to Sunday School. I want to encourage you to make an exception this day and come earlier so that you don't miss important parts of these presentations. After worship there will be a pot luck meal. You will have to forgive me over the next month for harping on this perhaps to the point of distraction. I am sure you will all make your best effort.

October 8th is also Crop Walk Sunday. Ordinarily about a dozen of us would meet at OWU at 1:30 to participate and many of you would contribute to the cause, alleviating hunger locally, nationally, and internationally. Because of Mission Sunday, this year we will not be emphasizing the walk itself, though

anyone who wants to walk is encouraged to do so. We do, however, encourage contributions to Crop Walk if you feel the Spirit's guidance. Because of the missions activities, that we want to be open-ended, we do not want anyone to feel the need to rush away from the after-church fellowship activities.

Disobedient

One of life's pressing questions is how to determine God's will in a troubled world. In today's reading we are given an example worthy of our attention.

Some of the stories in the bible are not really the kind to feature in a children's Sunday School class. The story of Jephthah and his daughter comes to mind and is somewhat troubling; as does David's sordid affair with Uriah's wife Bathsheba, which is an adult story. Solomon was supposed to have been wise but we are told he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and that is somewhat hard to explain. There is the violent encounter between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

We are more comfortable with the story of Noah's Ark because we love the zoo, and David's great underdog victory over Goliath. There is the story of Joseph's many colored coat and Daniel in the lion's den; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

One of our favorites is about Moses as a child when his mother floated him in a basket on the Nile River to save him from Pharaoh's edict that boy babies must be thrown into the river. Upon close examination, it turns out to be an adult story too, like the others.

The Violence

The king has issued an exceedingly evil and immoral edict, the killing of babies. It is hard not to notice, by the way, that he feared an immigrant labor population. Will times never change? It stretches one's imagination to think what it would be like to be the victim of such a policy. It doesn't seem like a children's story.

We read that the midwives were initially responsible for carrying it out, but they disobeyed, with a lame excuse that the births were occurring before they arrived. So the order was given to throw the boys in the Nile. My guess is that Pharaoh was like a lot of powerful people, a megalomaniac with an inferiority complex.

And you will have to pardon the pun because it is just too tempting, but he himself was the one in "denial" if he thought the order was going to be obeyed. Obedience is a good thing, but not in the face of such inhumanity, such violence.

We must understand the risk involved in this disobedience. That risk involves self-sacrifice.

The Girls

We would be amiss if we didn't notice that there are two young girls in this story and neither one was obedient.

I must give credit where credit is due, this past winter at the Methodist Theological School there was a preaching conference led by Anna Carter Florence, and she featured this text. I would be amiss if I failed to acknowledge her as the source of this idea.

All my life this text has been interpreted for me by people who treasured obedience so much that they never mentioned that it was the disobedience of the young girls that saved Moses' life and led to the great liberation, the Exodus itself.

Moses' sister, when Pharaoh's daughter discovered the basket and said, "this is one of the Hebrew babies," came out from where she was hiding and suggested, one could say, "ordered," (notice, the slave telling the princess what to do) that she find a nurse for the child.

Now the princess knew the order that her father had given, decided instead to obey the Hebrew girl and to disobey her father. Thus the two young girls conspired to disobey the king, and the result was Moses, the great lawgiver who gave, among other things, the command not to kill.

Obedience

One of the reasons that we have been taught so strongly that obedience is important is that we come from an empowered people. We are enfranchised. It is good for us to recognize that the bible was written largely by and for people who were not in power.

They found themselves in morally contradictory situations where obedience involved them in evil and thus they had to ask which was greater, the evil of disobedience, or the evil of obedience. This question about God's will is not easy to answer.

These stories were told to help people in similar situations. The Book of Exodus, like much of the Old Testament, came into its final form during the time of the Babylonian crisis, in which the Israelites found themselves once again enslaved. Like it or not, they practiced Divine disobedience.

Civil Disobedience

Sometimes, even among the dominant groups you will hear people say something like, "I love my country, but if I have to choose between God and country, then I will disobey my country." It has been named by Henry David Thoreau, who was heavily influenced by the scriptures, he called it, "civil disobedience."

We have made a large cottage industry out of civil disobedience. People everywhere are practicing it about something. Another word for it is, "sticking it to the man."

It doesn't matter if we are talking about ancient or contemporary times, whether we are looking through the lenses of the most powerful in the structure of things, or the least, these are complex situations that confuse and perplex, and often involve us in contradictions.

We are meant to understand that human life is precious, that justice and mercy are the nature of the divine, thus a part of the fabric out of which the universe is made. We are meant to affirm that the way to health involves self-sacrificing love, humility, generosity, and kindness, and not overbearing, dominate, oppressive power.

And part of what we learn from this story is that when we find ourselves in morally troubling circumstances, we can act with integrity, and it doesn't take an education or great physical power to do it, as exemplified by these two young girls.

What they did was bold and courageous, if disobedient, but it was also humane. Their example is articulated well by Paul in the 12th chapter of Romans. He speaks them as the implications of the salvation we

have received because of our acceptance of Christ by faith. His words will serve as our last this morning:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your *reasonable service; this is your spiritual worship*.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test what God's will is; God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

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